

From: Stephen Cronen-Townsend
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/24/02 12:38pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

Jan. 24, 2002

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a senior postdoctoral research associate in the Computer Science department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and am concerned about ways in which the proposed final judgment does not appear to restrict future anticompetitive practices by Microsoft. I am submitting these concerns according to provisions in the Tunney Act before the comment period ends on January 28, 2002.

The apparent fact that the proposed final judgment does not obligate Microsoft to release information about file formats is a very serious omission. As a Macintosh and Netscape Communicator user at home, I ran into Microsoft's past anticompetitive use of file formats last year, when I could not look at digitized photographs sent to me by a relative. It turns out that Microsoft invented a proprietary file format for image attachments to email that could only be decoded by their Outlook and other expensive email software. Their free software, Microsoft Outlook, and Netscape's free competing Messenger software (part of Netscape Communicator) that I used at home at the time could not read the format. After studying resources on the World Wide Web, and despite my capabilities as a computer scientist, I came to the conclusion that there was simply no way to view the images that I was sent on my Apple Macintosh computer, without personally reverse engineering Microsoft's proprietary file format and writing my own decoder, which I did not have the time (100's of hours, probably) to do.

There are plenty of completely workable and largely standardized formats for attaching images to email messages (MIME and JPEG, for instance), and it seems clear to me that I was kept from viewing the pictures of my distant cousins by Microsoft's anticompetitive practices. Since the proposed final judgment appears not to address this issue of proprietary file formats, I find it unacceptable.

Thank you for our time,
Stephen Cronen-Townsend
Greenfield, Massachusetts